

# Dignity Village V2 - Pueblo de Dignidad

A project by non-profit partners to provide better shelter in Matamoros, Mexico for asylum seekers

Dignity Village is a project to provide infrastructure and services to create safer, more sanitary refuge for asylum seekers living temporarily at the base of the Gateway International Bridge in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Through this project, non profit organizations (NGO partners) will provide resources and services in partnership with the Mexican Federal Authorities who are establishing services for the asylum seekers in Matamoros.

## Background

Families returned to Mexico under the US MPP program are reluctant to leave the area near the bridge due to concerns about safety, access to the port of entry for court appointments, and because they rely on volunteers for day to day sustenance they fear would be unavailable further from the bridge.

Conditions for families in the resulting makeshift camp have been extremely challenging, dangerous and unsanitary. The area lacks adequate housing, sanitation, and fresh-water.

Mexican Federal authorities are working to improve conditions and have begun construction of facilities in the adjacent park area along the banks of the river.



Dignity Village will work with Mexican government agencies to provide improvements, extensions, and upgrades to the facilities. By constructing temporary, portable structures capable of withstanding the winter weather and providing adequate shelter and sanitation for the families, the NGO partners will augment the work of federal and municipal authorities in Mexico.

The project is sponsored by a consortium of NGO aid agencies lead by Catholic Charities and Team Brownsville. A full list of participating NGO partners is available in Appendix I.

## Purpose

NGOs will invest in these improvements and deliver humanitarian services in partnership with Mexican authorities to operate Dignity Village as a welcoming temporary home for those seeking asylum and temporarily in Matamoros awaiting a chance to make an asylum claim at the US Port of Entry in Brownsville, or for those returned to Mexico to wait for a court date in the US while enrolled in MPP. Dignity Village will welcome all asylum seekers who meet these criteria regardless of age, faith, nationality, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity or political persuasion.

Dignity Village is an interfaith effort welcoming participation and contributions from people and groups of all religious backgrounds.

## Management

The Dignity Village project will provide infrastructure and services within the transit camp operated by Mexican authorities.

The Dignity Village project will be managed by a Leadership Committee organized under a [collaboration agreement](#) between the NGO partners.

The Leadership Committee will establish an advisory committee made up of volunteers from the asylum seeker community and management will consult this committee on matters of importance to the group, major decisions, and policies.

Dignity Village is committed to providing for improvements to the safety and human dignity of asylum seekers during their temporary stay in Matamoros.

Dignity Village will provide infrastructure to residents of the village.

- Temporary Housing
- Safe Drinking Water
- Sanitation facilities

Dignity Village NGO partner organizations will provide additional services including:

- Meals
- Basic Hygiene Supplies
- Legal Education
- Education for the children

- Basic Health Services

Partners providing services in Dignity Village will operate under written agreements with the Dignity Village Leadership Committee that establish a shared code of conduct respected by all partners.

For a list of participating partners, please see Appendix I.

## Temporary Housing

Currently most asylum seekers in Matamoros are living in soft-sided camping tents on the concrete plaza near the bridge. The federal authorities are building large tent pavilions on adjacent park and will be encouraging all the migrants to relocate to this area.

We propose to supplement and eventually replace the soft-sided camping tents with hardwall structures.

The primary housing stock planned for these structures is based on the IKEA Foundation “Better Shelter” which has been used in refugee camps throughout the world since 2014. These simple structures which can be assembled in four hours by 4-5 people, provide shelter for up to five persons per structure. The units are portable and can be relocated as necessary.



*Figure 1: Better Shelters at a transit camp on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2015.*

The Dignity Village team propose start with a supply of 432 housing units capable of housing up to 2,160 people at an average capacity of 5 persons.

The Dignity Village team will acquire the housing units from Better Shelter and ship them from Gdansk, Poland to Matamoros. It will require approximately 45 to 60 days from approval of this plan for the first units to arrive in Matamoros. Additional units could arrive with 60 days prior notice.

The intention, subject to approval from local and federal authorities, is to place these housing units on flat ground near the “football field” located in Matamoros Jardin - between Av. Tamaulipas and the river.



## Placement

The proposed placement of the Dignity Village shelters will be in the park land adjacent to the bridge plaza on the banks of the river. Final designs will be conducted after receiving preliminary approvals by an onsite team of engineers with experience building similar camps.

NOTE: Placement will change based on recent installation of large tent pavilions in the football field.



Figure 2: Google Map Satellite photo of Jardin area of Matamoros with red outline identifying the approximate area of the proposed Better Shelter placement.



Figure 3: Satellite photo of Jardin area of Matamoros with green boxes showing a draft layout of the Better Shelter units on location. This design was prepared by the Civil Engineer department of Villanova University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania based on available satellite imagery.

For more details see: [Villanova Engineering Design](#)

## Registration

Registration services will be established in order to keep a list of asylum seekers desiring to reside in Dignity Village. This registration process may need to be coordinated with the federal authorities in Mexico depending on their requirements.

The list will be used to prioritize assignment of housing units and establish eligibility for other Dignity Village services. Priority for housing assignments will focus first on families with young children. A full prioritization model will be published and a transparent list will be managed so that everyone understands where they are on the list at any point in time.

Registered residents of Dignity Village will be issued photo ID cards for the purpose of demonstrating eligibility for services within the community.

## Standards of Conduct

All residents, prior to being assigned housing units, must sign a written pledge to adhere to the community standards for Dignity Village which will be based on policies drafted by the UNHCR in previous temporary refugee communities. Residents will sign documents that clarify that breach of these behavioral standards will result in loss of the assigned housing and expulsion from Dignity Village.

## Physical Security

Physical security in Dignity Village will be provided through a collaboration between local and federal Mexican authorities.

## Safe Drinking Water

Dignity Village will provide safe drinking water to the residents of the village. The plan for safe drinking water is to operate two AquaBlocks filtration systems each capable of delivering 1500 liters of safe drinking water every hour. There is deliberate redundancy in this plan to ensure that safe water is available even if one unit becomes inoperable. Units will be maintained by trained members of Dignity Village with the assistance of Global Response Management and Planet Water Foundation.





Figure 3: AquaBlock unit (source [planet-water.org](http://planet-water.org))



Figure 4: AquaBlock units (source [planet-water.org](http://planet-water.org))

These units are available from the Planet Water Foundation ([planet-water.org](http://planet-water.org))

## Sanitation

Dignity Village, in coordination with Mexican authorities will install and maintain sanitation systems adequate to the needs of the residents of the village. These will include both well-maintained porta potties and also plumbed temporary toilet and shower facilities based on trailer platforms and maintained by the village team and serviced adequately to ensure a clean and safe environment.

## Community Building

To promote a sense of community, pride, and self-sufficiency within Dignity Village residents will be asked to provide services that would be mutually beneficial to the entire village. This would be voluntary and could include the following skills with verification of competency:



- Teaching
- Childcare
- Cook
- Gardener
- Landry
- Building Construction/Maintenance
- Fire Brigade
- Community Watch
- Translation Services
- Plumbing (maintenance of AquaBlocks and mobile toilet systems)
- Electrician
- Sanitation

## Appendix I

### Participating Organizations

If your organization is interested in participating in this project, please add the appropriate names and information below.

Organization	Role(s) in Project	Primary Contact(s)
Misioneras de Jesus	Principal Organizer	Sister Norma Pimentel
Catholic Charities RGV	Principal Organizer	Sister Norma Pimentel
TeamBrownsville, Inc.	Financial Sponsor & Operating Partner (meals, etc.)	Woodson Martin, Andrea Rudnik
Resource Center Matamoros	Operating Partner (Support Social Services)	Gaby Zavala
Lawyers for Good Government	Operating Partner (Legal Services for MPP)	Charlene DCruz
Angry Tias and Abuelas of the RGV	Financial Sponsor & Operating Partner (supplies, etc.)	Jennifer Harbury
Global Response Management	Operating Partner (health services)	Helen Perry

# Appendix II

## Operating Budget Proposal

The initial financial goal of the project is to secure \$1,000,000 USD in funding from sponsors and donors to cover the costs of constructing the village and operating the basic infrastructure of the village for a six-month period.

Revenues	Description	Amount in USD
		<i>Tentative amounts</i>
	<b>Contributions from Sponsoring Partners</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>
	TeamBrownsville, Inc.	\$250,000
	Catholic Charities RGV	\$250,000
	Angry Tias and Abuelas of RGV	\$75,000
	Other donors	\$425,000
<b>Expenses</b>		
	<b>Initial Capital Costs</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>
	Better Shelter Units (400 units)	\$520,000
	Toilet Trailers (2 units)	\$50,000
	AquaBlock Water Filtration (2 units)	\$50,000
	Miscellaneous	\$80,000
	<b>Ongoing Monthly Expenses</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
	Security Service Contract	\$10,000
	Sanitation Services	\$5,000
	Safe Drinking Water	\$5,000
	Treated Water for Showers & Clothes Washing	\$5,000
	Other Expenses	\$25,000

# Appendix III

## Code of Conduct

All partner organizations and all volunteers working in Dignity Village agree to abide by the following code of conduct:

We have a responsibility to protect asylum seekers and to avoid exposing them to further harm as a result of our actions. We also have a duty of care to all our volunteers. We aim to follow the UN's humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, avoiding harm, accountability, participation and respect. In practice, that means we all need to follow this Code of Conduct.

These rules apply to all work with Asylum Seekers in Dignity Village.

We will ensure that our conduct is consistent with and reflects the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations: respect for fundamental human rights, social justice and human dignity, and respect for the equal rights of men and women.

We will assist the Dignity Village team to actively promote adherence to the principles of international refugee law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We will be guided by the core values of the UN system, including professionalism, integrity and respect for diversity, and will maintain an international perspective at all times.

Our primary commitment is to ensure the protection of and assistance to asylum seekers and other persons of concern. We are committed to supporting the fullest possible participation of asylum seekers and other persons of concern – as individuals, families and communities – in decisions that affect their lives.

We will respect the dignity and worth of every individual, will promote and practice understanding, respect, compassion and tolerance, and will demonstrate discretion and maintain confidentiality as required.

We will aim to build constructive and respectful working relations with our humanitarian partners, will continuously seek to improve our performance, and will foster a climate that encourages learning, supports positive change, and applies the lessons learned from our experience.

We will show respect for all persons equally without distinction whatsoever of race, gender, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, language, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status, disability, political conviction, or any other distinguishing feature. We will strive to remove all barriers to equality.

We will respect the cultures, customs and traditions of all peoples, and will strive to avoid behaving in ways that are not acceptable in a particular cultural context. However, when the tradition or practice is considered by the relevant organ of the UN to be directly contrary to an international human rights instrument or standard, we will be guided by the applicable human rights instrument or standard.